



## RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

10 October 2017

### MINUTES

*PRESENT:*

Professor David Bogle (*Chair*)

Dr Sam Smidt; Mr Derfel Owen; Mr Ben Colvill; Ms Helen Notter; Professor Alison Diduck; Dr Martins Paporinskis; Dr Paulo Drinot; Professor Martin Oliver; Dr Benet Salway; Dr Sally Leevers; Professor Kaila Srαι; Professor Kirsten Harvey; Professor Tania Monteiro; Dr Simon Banks; Professor Stephen Marshall.

*In attendance:* Mr Darren Payne (Secretary to Research Degrees Committee); Ms Lizzie Vinton (Assessment Regulations and Governance Manager, SRS).

Apologies for absence were received from: Dr Elvira Bramon; Mr Mark Crawford; Dr Ruth Siddall; Dr Hynek Pikhart; Dr Andrew Stoker; Dr Jill Norman.

*Key to abbreviations*

CRS	Completing Research Status
FRDC	Faculty Research Degrees Committee
HRPC	Human Resources Policy Committee
PRES	Postgraduate Research Experience Survey
RDC	Research Degrees Committee

### Preliminary business

#### 1 TERMS OF REFERENCE, CONSTITUTION AND MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 **Received:** The RDC Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for 2017-18 at RDC 1-01 (17-18).
- 1.2 The committee welcomed the following new members:
  - Dr Sam Smidt, Nominee of Director of UCL Arena
  - Professor Tania Monteiro, FGT Maths and Physical Sciences
  - Dr Jill Norman, FGT Medical Sciences

- Dr Paulo Drinot, FGT Social and Historical Sciences

1.3 The Students' Union will be reminded to nominate a new student representative as per the RDC ToR/membership.

**Action: RDC Secretary.**

1.4 Arts and Humanities Faculty Graduate Tutor: post currently vacant – to be covered by Dr Helen Matthews (Deputy Joint Faculty Tutor) until filled.

## **2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

2.1 **Approved:** The minutes of the meeting held 5 June 2017.

## **3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

### **A UCLU PGTA REPORT RESPONSE FROM HUMAN RESOURCES**

*(RDC Minute 40, 5 June 2017)*

3A.1 The Director of HR Strategy & Planning has confirmed in writing that HRPC agreed the action plan in that report, and that HR are currently taking forward implementation of the recommendations.

### **B PGR REGULATIONS UPDATE**

*(RDC Minute 38, 5 June 2017)*

3B.1 The Assessment Regulations and Governance Manager reported on updates to PGR Regulations intended for 2018/19 session.

3B.2 Progression, Upgrade, and Final assessment sections need to be reviewed in order to reconcile parts of regulations that are duplicated across different types of research programmes, with the aim of streamlining this into one set of PGR regulations. The Regulations Working Group has already signed off chapters relating to Admissions and Registration.

3B.3 Initial draft of streamlined PGR regulations to be discussed at March 2018 RDC.

3B.4 No new regulations were published for 2017/18, but the Academic Manual has been amended to make Research Degree guidance and regulations easier to find.

3B.5 The Chair agreed that the best approach for making more significant changes going forwards is to split up work on each section for specific working groups in order to provide clearer focus. The Chair will suggest various people to get involved with this work and aim to start as soon as possible.

#### 4 RESEARCH COUNCIL SUBMISSION DEADLINES

- 4.1 The Chair drew RDC's attention to revised RCUK guidance that now states that students are expected to submit within their period funded, typically 3 years (see point 79 of the RCUK Training Grant Guide, revised July 2017: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/publications/traininggrantguidance-pdf/>)
- 4.2 This change is effective from 2017/18 onwards, (and applies to all Research Councils) so any student who commences their studies this academic year will be expected to submit within their period of funding.
- 4.3 RDC noted that current UCL regulations allow for a CRS year for writing up after the funded period. Student Records Manager reported that the majority of students currently submit in this CRS period rather than 3 years. It was noted therefore that it would be a big culture change at UCL for students to submit within 3 years.
- 4.4 RDC raised concerns with this, and noted that clarification would be needed from the Research Council as to whether or not the funded period would need to be defined from the outset, which would be difficult to achieve given that students may need to extend CRS for a variety of reasons. CRS is also seen as integral to the PhD for some as it gives some leeway, and an opportunity to catch up where necessary.
- 4.5 However, it was noted that having students complete within the funded period makes sense, with students writing up during their funded period, rather than at the end; the expectation should be that a student can complete within the funded period without the need for an extension.
- 4.6 **Agreed** – that RDC recommends UCL waits to see further developments from the Research Council, given this would be a significant change in culture for the institution. RDC will need to discuss this in the future. In the meantime the change to expectations will be discussed with DTP/CDT directors at their regular meetings with the Doctoral School.

**ACTION: the Chair**

<b>Matters for discussion</b>
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#### 5 POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE SURVEY

- 5.1 **Received** – PRES 2017 results at RDC 1-02 (17-18).

- 5.2 The Senior Executive Officer (Doctoral School) presented the PRES 2017 results to RDC, noting that UCL's response rate was 47% (up from 36% in 2015), broadly in line with the sector response rate of 46%.
- 5.3 Currently negative areas of the PRES results for UCL were:
- Supervision – including feedback quality, and frequency of meetings.
  - Resources – including issues with student space and computing.
  - Research Culture – including departmental research ambience and opportunities to become involved in the wider research community.

Compared to the sector, the most positive aspects were the provision of specialist resources and the provision of good departmental seminars. Teaching had also received an increase in positive responses since the 2015 survey, particularly in relation to the numbers reporting having received formal training.

- 5.4 RDC members noted that contextually UCL should be much higher in research culture than where it currently is (bottom quartile of the Russell Group), and there should be an expectation for this to improve given UCL's reputation as a research-intensive institution.
- 5.5 The committee also noted the considerable variance between faculties, including between similar disciplines, across a range of questions. It was agreed that exploration of these differences might help to identify ways to improve the student experience.
- 5.6 **Agreed:** That Faculties were asked to take the results to their FRDCs and assess the data further in order to draw up at least three faculty priorities for action over the coming year, reporting back to a future meeting of RDC. FRDCS were also asked to oversee departmental responses and actions within their faculties.

**ACTION: Faculty Graduate Tutors**

**6 ORAL UPDATES FROM EACH FACULTY ON PRES ACTION POINTS**

- 6.1 **Received** – Spreadsheet outlining PRES Action Points at RDC 1-03 (17-18).
- 6.2 Faculty Tutors provided brief oral updates to the PRES Action Points from 2016/17 as follows:
- Engineering: 60% score for knowledge of Code of Practice – students have been informed multiple times, and the link is very prominent, but there are still low scores in this area. Deadline Awareness – process of culture change which will take time, but slowly getting there (not necessarily reflected in PRES 2017). Improving Research Culture – mainly the Cumberland Lodge 3-day retreat aims to improve this: 5 in total across the year fully funded, and will be particularly

good at cohort building.

- Mathematical and Physical Sciences: Academic Concerns – re-focusing on core issues, and inductions. Research Integrity – currently rolling out a faculty agreement on this. Submission Rates – in the context of PhD submission rates for the MAPS faculty, UCL central data services records timely submission rates of 65-70% for MAPS; while our own records indicate near 90%, well over the 75% target. The view of the MAPS research students committee (FRSC) and its FGT on the apparent low timely submission rates of 65-70% is that this is an administrative issue, not an academic issue. MAPS records indicate submission rates of about 90% within CRS. MAPS interpret timely submission as “submission within CRS”. The two largest MAPS departments have a high proportion of students on 3.5 year studentships, for which CRS ends at 4.5 years. However, UCL allows only for 3-year programmes and 4-year programmes. Hence 3.5 year students are routinely marked as late submissions (similarly other students funded for 3.3 or 3.7 years as EPSRC, the main Chemistry/Physics funder, allows for such non-integer funding periods). This and the incomplete recording of students who leave early accounts for the discrepancy.
- Life Sciences: Research Culture – encouraging social nights with alumni/staff involvement so students feel they are less isolated. Students have informed staff they have few opportunities to meet others, so this is intended to remedy that. Mentoring – first years think this is a good idea, but this view is not shared by higher years. However, this needs to be encouraged as it is good for CV development. Research Integrity – almost all departments are now running the dilemma game, and it is being seen as more important with staff are also attending sessions. Submission rates – very good, with stricter deadlines in the 4<sup>th</sup> year ensuring 100% submission rate.
- Institute of Education: Teaching Opportunities – difficult to give these due to the lack of undergraduate teaching opportunities locally, but happy to promote any vacancies that other faculties may have if not able to fill these with their own students. Space – currently refurbishing rooms that will help alleviate some space issues. Research Culture – awareness of issues in place, and currently supporting students to ensure visibility.
- Social and Historical Sciences: Research Culture – suggests research culture should have a prominent feature in this year’s FRDC meetings, particularly ways of tackling this. Departments are in positions where they have very good Research Excellence Framework scores, but not necessarily reflected in the PRES (need to understand why students cannot see this). The Faculty noted that UCL should be providing as stimulating a research culture as possible to its research degree students during their time here. The Faculty noted that London as a whole is second to none for researchers and location, and UCL should be leading on this with students seeing this clearly. Cohort Building also seen as a key issue, with staff and students doing more together as a means of improving

a sense of community. Space – students would like there to be an expectation of space for each student, and suggested that Estates are informed that the expectation of a world-class university is to provide adequate space in order to provide the best training for students.

- Laws: Space – moving to Bidborough House temporarily has not helped with student satisfaction, and would explain some of the negative response here. Laws currently funding students to improve temporary accommodation, and is liaising with Estates to see what can be done in the short term. Research Culture – similarly affected by Bidborough House temporary move, with low score for supervision thought to be a consequence.
- Bartlett: Space –Completion/Time Management – no current update, but a lot of work has been put into this. The Bartlett expect this will reflect in future PRES surveys once the current cohort exposed to this comes through. Training Initiatives – various funded initiatives on data ethics, and inter-disciplinary training in some of the main areas students are interested in.
- The Chair noted that there would be opportunities for further discussion at the upcoming Doctoral School meetings with each faculty, and this would help to identify action points for each Faculty. Research Culture particularly has been highlighted as a main concern for 2017/18.

## 7 ORAL UPDATES FROM EACH FACULTY ON DEPARTMENTAL PGR STUDENT SPACE SURVEY

- 7.1 RDC noted that that space surveys were either currently being carried out by Faculties, or were due to be this term. It was recommended that the SHS Space Survey template be re-circulated to all Graduate Faculty Tutors.
- 7.2 **Agreed:** RDC Secretary will re-circulate the SHS Space Survey template and Faculty Graduate Tutors would ensure that they returned the findings of their surveys to the RDC secretary in sufficient time for them to be collated for the next RDC.

**ACTION: RDC Secretary and Faculty Graduate Tutors**

## 8 RESEARCH STUDENT MENTAL WELLBEING AT UCL

- 8.1 **Received** – report from Wellbeing Steering Group at RDC 1-04 (17-18).
- 8.2 RDC received a holding paper from the Wellbeing Steering Group acknowledging work is underway, with a newly-formed Wellbeing Working Group. This will first meet on 9 November 2017 in order to create an action plan based on the 22 recommendations from the original report (RDC Paper 2-03, 16-17).

- 8.3 **Agreed:** The Secretary to liaise with the Wellbeing Steering Group, in order to clarify a few key issues: whether or not Wellbeing Champions would be PGR students, how the sharing of research can be facilitated, and who will be responsible for each action point (the paper notes the Wellbeing Working Group will take lead on points 18, 19, and 20, but RDC is expecting the Wellbeing group to coordinate action by other parties to the remaining actions points as well).

**ACTION: RDC Secretary**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Other matters for approval or information</b></p>
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**9 ANNUAL REPORT ON MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF FACULTY COMMITTEES RESPONSIBLE FOR PGR STUDENT PROVISION 2016-17**

- 9.1 **Noted** – Annual Report of FRDC Minutes at RDC 1-05 (17-18).

**10 BRIEFING ON PROGRAMME SUMMARIES AND ACADEMIC MODEL**

10.1 The Assessment Regulations and Governance Manager provided a brief oral update on the upcoming Programme Summaries, and Academic Model Project work within the Registry. The aim of the Programme Summaries was to be a single source of truth for programmes, and a standalone document that can be referred to for all purposes such as admissions, and advertising. Programme specific regulations are intended to be included in the summaries, rather than the main regulations so everything is clearly defined.

10.2 Academic Services will be visiting departments to collect data very soon, with the intention of finishing by February. Postgraduate Research should be fairly simple compared to Taught programmes, but colleagues can contact Academic Services for further information.

**11 LIST OF NEW PGR PROGRAMMES**

- 11.1 **Noted** – an updated list outlining all current PGR programmes at UCL at RDC 1-06 (17-18).

**12 DRAFT RDC ANNUAL REPORT TO AC 2016-17**

- 12.1 **Noted** – draft RDC Annual Report to AC at RDC 1-07 (17-18).

**13 ANNUAL NEW AND AMENDED PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATIONS APPROVED BY RDC CHAIR'S ACTION**

- 13.1 **Noted** – programmes approved by RDC Chair's Action at RDC 1-08 (17-18).

**14 ANONYMISED SUSPENSION OF REGULATIONS REPORT**

- 14.1 **Noted** – the suspensions of regulations at RDC 1-09 (17-18).

**15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**A PGR ADMISSIONS DATA**

15A.1 **Noted** – RDC received a late paper relating to PGR Admissions Data at RDC 1-10 (17-18).

15A.2 RDC noted a 9% drop in PGR Admissions, but offer rates up by 14%. EU offers have increased from 2016, but are still lower than 2015.

**16 DATES OF NEXT MEETING**

- Tuesday 13 March 2018, 11am to 1pm, IOE - Bedford Way (20) – 804.
- Tuesday 5 June 2018, 11am to 1pm, Malet Place Engineering Building 1.20.

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